Telephone interview with former HM2 Charles W. Neefe, Vietnam hospital corpsman, interviewed by Jan K. Herman, Historian of the Navy Medical Department, 2 February 2004.

Where are you from originally?
A little place called Big Spring, TX, exactly halfway between Dallas and El Paso.

Did you go to school there?
I was born and raised there and went to school there.

When did you decide you were going to join the Navy?
About 1965. A judge decided. I got in a little trouble with an automobile. I hit a guy and run over a mailbox and the judge thought it might be a good idea of I spent a few years in the military. So I joined the Navy.

Where did you go to boot camp?
San Diego. And then corps school. Right out of corps school I spent about 3 months at the hospital and then went to pharmacy school in San Diego.

What year did you graduate from pharmacy school?
It was 1966.

Had you thought about being a corpsman or did they just assign you to corps school?
I had worked at a mental hospital in the geriatric ward during the summer and on weekends when I was younger. I enjoyed it. I handled all the folks who had expired. They called it expired but they had died during the night. I would bag them and send them to the morgue. Death didn't bother me. I had done that since I was 15. So I decided to be a corpsman and applied. In those days, if you applied, you were taken because of Vietnam. They needed a lot of corpsmen and they were herding them through, believe me.

After you left corps school, did you work at the hospital there until you entered pharmacy school?
Yes.

What happened after you left pharmacy school?
I immediately went to Camp Pendleton.

So you were on the list for FMF right away.
I didn't go to FMF school right away. I just went to the headquarters for Camp Pendleton. I started out in the dispensary there at a very small pharmacy. We could volunteer to go with the Marines on different operations. I volunteered for Regimental Schools, which was a training program for guys who got back from Vietnam, preparing them either for a second tour or just getting them ready to go. They worked a lot with young guys out of ITR, which was the infantry training. I volunteered to go into the field them a lot just to get out of the dispensary. I learned a lot there just about the daily operations of the Marine Corps.

So you weren't really attached to the Marine Corps at that point.

I was attached to them but I wasn't FMF 8404 yet. In those days, if you were at a Marine Corps clinic and they needed you and you volunteered, they issued you 782 gear, cammies, and the whole bit. I only went 3 or 4 days a month with them.

When did the transition take place? When did you become FMF?

Right after that. I went to FMF school right there at Del Mar. Immediately at graduation, I went to Vietnam.

What did they teach you at Field Med School?

Nothing I didn't already know. We marched a lot and we learned the 782 gear. We learned the M14, which in those days was the transition weapon to the M16. We learned how to break down the .45, and learned basic field medical techniques. It was rather a boring 4 weeks.

When you say you learned the 782 gear, what does that mean?

How to roll up your shelter half, pack your pack, put your E-tool on, how to wear your pack so it doesn't rub on the back, how to march with a pack on, how to dress your boots. They taught a corpsman how to become a Marine in 4 weeks.

Were you carrying a Unit 1 as a corpsman?

Oh, yes. I had a Unit 1 before that.

What was in the Unit 1?

There was a little surgical kit, some forceps, a needle driver, a couple of mosquitoes, a tweezers, battle dressings, ace wraps, some gauze. When you got with the Marines you completely revamped what you carried. What was in it went away.

How did you revamp yours?

I carried a lot of battle dressings, a lot of ace wraps, as much serum albumin as I could. In those days serum albumin came in a little can. I think it was 500cc. And it was inside a cardboard can that you broke open. I'd have four to six of those because IVS were essential. I got every hemostat I could get and carried those. I'd take out the insides out of my flak jacket and stuff in more battle dressings.

You took out the fiberglass plates from your flak jacket?

Yes. I probably had 40 or 50 battle dressings on me at one time.

What about morphine syrettes?

A lot of morphine syrettes. We used them quite a bit. A lot of Marines up front even had them. I don't know where they got them. They were very common.

When did you go to Vietnam?

In September of '67.

Did you go with your unit or by yourself?

I went with a group of corpsmen. We went to Okinawa and then flew into Danang. The very same day I was briefed by the division surgeon's office. I remember going to Dong Ha the very first day, checking into the 9th Marines. And that very same day in country, they loaded me on a chopper and flew me to Conthien by 4 o'clock that day. Conthien was hot and heavy and the 9th Marines were getting their butts kicked up there.

What battalion were you with?
3/9.

What do you remember about that day?
I remember coming off that chopper, going toward the battalion aid station, and a Marine grabbed me and said, "Doc, we need you." They took me up a hill and there was an Army guy from an artillery unit. All the artillery at Conthien--the 105s--were supplied by the Army. This Army guy had an eviscerated bowel, an arm blown off, a foot blown off, and a bad head wound. He was the first injury I saw. I reached out, turned him over, he said, "Help me." I threw up, and he died. That's all I remember.

Then I was taken to the BAS. We got there just as it was getting dark. And then we had a terrific rocket attack that night. I said, "Where the hell am I?" There must have been 4 to 500 rockets that came in that night. A rocket is a nasty thing coming in. It's got a sound like nothing else.

So, you were in the battalion aid station at that time?
Yes.

Where were you hiding?
We were taking casualties. Everybody was working. I was the new guy so I was loading them on the gurney. We had one physician, a battalion surgeon, and some very experienced corpsmen there. We'd bring them in, they'd work on them. If we had to medevac them, we'd hold them until the next morning. That front of the battalion aid station had a blast wall about 8 foot high by about 20 foot and it was just packed with body bags on the outside. And we'd send out the bodies when a chopper came in.

The next morning they sent me to 106s (weapons) which was up on the hill facing north. It had a big bunker. I'll never forget this guy as long as I live. Brown was his name--Gunner Brown. He was a W-4 warrant officer Marine. One of the toughest guys I've ever served with. He said to me, "You're our corpsman. Get your ass in that bunker. You can do what you want but when I call you, you be here." The bunker was rather large. We shared it with part of an infantry group. We had two 106s, a .50 cal. There was a trench facing to the west. I spent a lot of time in that trench watching the snipers in the tree line.

Were you armed at that time?
Yes. I carried an M16 and a .45. When I finally got a shotgun, I carried it. It was taken away from me a couple of times but I got it back. The chief at the BAS didn't want me carrying a shotgun. He thought that would make me a combatant when I wasn't a combatant. They were still adhering to that myth in the rear area. Some of the meanest people I knew were the corpsmen in the field. You had to be to survive. I grew up as a marksman as a kid. My dad was

a national rifle champion so I grew up shooting pretty well. And the Marines loved me because I didn't mind getting in the fray.

So, by this time no more M14s.

No. We had just transitioned to the M16, which we called Manny Matell because they were plastic pieces of garbage. Mine had a buffer spring that hung up about every fourth round. So I shot it on single shot. In those days they were full automatic or single shot, not the three-round burst of today. It was the A1 model. The flash suppressors were poor. You could see the flash come out the barrel. We had a lot of trouble with them. The troops didn't like them at all. They jammed constantly. It seemed like I spent half my life cleaning that M16. We were in a trench that ran about 50 yards. And there was probably 30 Marines in that trench. I spent my days watching the tree line. We would bait people in the tree line with those 106s. We had a sniper and a recoilless problem from the tree line. They'd come in, put a recoilless rifle up, hit a bunker, and knock it down.

Were these VC or NVA?

These were NVA regulars. They were tough. Conthien was no cakewalk. It was the filthiest, ugliest place I've ever been in my life.

When was this?

September and October of '67.

How long were you there?

Two months. We were under siege. The daily ritual was: Get up in the morning, call in air strikes. They'd napalm and bomb to the north and west of us. You'd go out on patrols at night. They would do operations where they'd take companies out, set up for ambushes. It was the monsoon season. It was nothing but red mud up there. You'd slip and slide. Most of us didn't have jungle boots. Most of the jungle boots never got to us up north. You had to fight to get jungle boots in those days. We wore the slick, leather boots.

And it was probably hot, humid, and wet.

No. It was cold. It was up north. It was elevated. And it was September and October. There were heavy rains. It was probably 70 degrees but with the chill factor of the rain, it was cold. You were always just shuddering and always wet.

I moved from Weapons to Kilo Company when they lost two corpsmen. I was the only corpsmen down in this one section of Kilo Company. Kilo Company was just thrown together because it had lost so many people. We were in a hole right above the ontos. I don't know if you know what an ontos was. It was like a tracked vehicle with four 106s on it. It was a very light weapon and would bog down in the muddy very easily.

What were the 106s?

They were recoilless rifles. It could fire a fleshette round which was made up of little arrows or BBs--thousands of them. When you hit a tree line with that, you would go out on patrol and just find chunks of NVA. Those rounds would just decimate the NVA. It was a very wicked weapon.

We did a lot of night patrols. I was with a platoon sergeant named Bob Brogan. He was on his second tour. He taught me a lot. We'd go out at night and set up ambushes. If we went

out and they knew where we were, they would barrage us with mortars. You'd have molten steel from mortars falling from the trees. Everybody had little metal burns on their backs and arms from the mortars.

How did you set up an ambush?

We would pick a predetermined trail that we would know the NVA would use. We'd then set up a side ambush and wait for them to come through, then hit them. I was wounded on one of those. I got about a 10-inch laceration on my right lower arm. We pulled back and went into Conthien and I was medevaced down to Delta Med in Dong Ha. They sewed it up, I had no nerve damage, and was back up that day.

While I was down there, I saw my first corpsman who was killed. He was flying medevacs and he took a round through the bottom of the chopper, through his buttocks, through his genitals, and he just bled to death.

That must have been a pretty sobering experience.

Yes it was, but by then I had seen a lot. We would lose four or five men a day, maybe more on our side of Conthien. The biggest problem at Conthien was when it got muddy and saturated. They'd hit one of those bunkers with a recoilless and it would collapse and you'd have 10 or 12 Marines in a bunker you'd have to dig out. Very few survived because of the mud, the slush, and the weight of those sandbags. When we went to dig them out, their snipers in the tree line would take a few more Marines out so that slowed us down.

This was a very strange war. There were no fronts. They had you surrounded. You went out on patrol and killed a few of them. . .

The whole idea was to stop the NVA from coming down from the north. Have you heard of the McNamara Line?

Yes.

That was McNamara's genius idea to . . . It seemed like it was miles across but I'd bet it was only a thousand meters at most across where they cleared a complete stretch from the ocean to Conthien. I think it was supposed to go to Khe Sanh.

They were supposed to plant the area with sensors.

They had sensors that didn't work. But the problem was that when that mud packed, you couldn't dig in, you had no protection, you couldn't dig in on the trace site, you couldn't dig a fox hole. You had to get to the tree line. If you were caught out in the open, you were a sitting duck. The Seabees were just to the west of us. We would get them to pull a bulldozer and take our patrol across with the blade in front of us. We went across two or three times like that.

And the NVA were hiding in the tree line the whole time.

We were in NVA country. Conthien was the northernmost outpost that we had. The Bin Hoi River wasn't but 2 or 3 miles north from there. It was just saturated with NVA. There were as many as five to 10 thousand NVA in the area at any given time.

How long did all this go on?

I understand that it started about May of '67 and in July there was a major battle. There was a siege of Conthien and it was almost overrun. That was in July, just before I got there.

We were in Conthien getting ready to pull out in October and we got hit really heavy with mortars and artillery. I remember getting hit and that's all I remember waking up on the *Repose*. My injury was more from concussion blast than anything. I had a piece of shrapnel go in the side of an eye which later was removed. It wasn't removed till last year. I spent a couple days on the hospital ship and then was flown back to Dong Ha and I worked my way back up.

Did you ever go up to Khe Sanh?

Yes. I was at Khe Sanh. We flew up there twice from Conthien. There was nothing going on then. It was just an outpost. It was before things got hot and heavy and the siege.

Did you ever get to the Rock Pile?

We were up there for 2 days. What was so neat about it was that we didn't get any contact there but they had what they called "rock apes." The monkeys would literally throw rocks at the Marines and the Marines would throw them back. The injuries I saw there were rock injuries from rock apes hitting Marines. The apes lived in the hillsides above. I guess the Marines taught them how to do it out of boredom. You would throw a rock up and all of a sudden there would be 10 or 12 rocks coming back at you. I thought it had to be NVA but they told me it was the monkeys. They could throw a rock the size of a baseball and harder and further than we could throw it. It was amazing. And they were pretty accurate, too.

What do you remember about the *Repose*?

I remember it was clean and white, good food, nurses, a lot of wounded Marines. I went to the ship's store and must have bought 20 tubes of Crest toothpaste and Dial Soap and took it all back with me.

What did they treat you for?

They treated me for shrapnel wounds of the face but the concussion was what they worried about. I was not the same for 4 or 5 weeks after that. Whatever it was went off right on top of us. They say a couple of Marines on the other side of the bunker were killed.

When did that happen?

I want to say October 15th of '67. Then I got back up just as they were pulling out in late October. 2/4 relieved 3/9. I remember the hump down to Dong Ha. I remember getting halfway down and here we were setting along the road and over the hill came a bunch of Vietnamese mamasans selling cold Coca Cola and fresh baked cookies.

That must have been weird.

It was. You could buy an ice cold coke, which we hadn't seen in months and cookies. The cokes were a dollar and no one would eat the cookies. The atmosphere just totally changed when you got through the Seabee lines. It was like there was no war or anything. It was very peaceful.

We got to Dong Ha and I got two Purple Hearts. Because of that, they told me I couldn't go back to a grunt company. I would be sent to a med battalion. So I was sent down to 3rd Med. If I had gotten a third wound, I would have been sent home. I had actually been hit a third time

in the field and the second lieutenant had radioed that everybody in that platoon was to get a Purple Heart. I didn't even know I had gotten that third wound. That one would have gotten me out of Vietnam but I didn't know that until 1982.

When did that happen?

It happened when we were on patrol. We were taking mortar rounds and the metal fragments would just drop down on everybody. Little pieces would penetrate your flak jacket. It was unbelievable. I got a pretty big piece on the back of my neck. I'd dig the pieces out of people's arms and legs and any place that wasn't covered by a flak jacket.

I guess you thanked God for a flak jacket on many occasions.

The flak jacket was great but it could be penetrated. If you were hit directly with an AK-47 or an SKS is was over. They served a purpose and it was for flak not a bullet.

So you went to 3rd Med in Phu Bai.

Yes. I was assigned to supply. Any convoy that went through I could get on and ride between Phu Bai and Danang or Phu Bai up to Dong Ha, I'd get on as a corpsman. I didn't want to stay in the rear. I'd ride up and catch a chopper back. In those days you went to the LZ and wait till a chopper was going to where you were going, and then you'd get a ride back down.

You were assigned to 3rd Med.

Yes. I'd go up to Dong Ha and fly back the next day.

Ostensibly for what purpose?

The supply said he needed a corpsman. The transport battalion was right next to us that took medical supplies up and they needed a corpsman to ride with them and I just volunteered. We would ride the trucks up and return by chopper. And if we went down to Danang to pick up supplies, I'd ride the convoy down. It was a lot of fun. We got hit a few times but normally it was pretty safe.

On January 1st, 1968 they asked for volunteers to go on a float. I didn't know what a float was but I volunteered. They said I'd be with a battalion on a ship off the coast supporting ground operations. I and a couple of OR techs volunteered and we went up to Hue. We caught a PBR out to an LST and we rode it to Subic Bay and got on the *Iwo Jima*, which was an LPH. It was state of the art at that time. It had two operating rooms, an ICU, about a hundred-man ward in the back. It was a nice medical facility. The problem with it was that the hangar bay was below it and you had to take an elevator up to it. As a result, it was a very slow process to move the wounded.

So, where did you go with the ship?

Back off the coast of Vietnam and picked up 2/4 as our float battalion.

Where did you pick them up?

Part of them at Subic and some of them off Vietnam. There was a squadron of H-34s. These were piston-driven and English-made helicopters. The Hueys weren't in yet. The H-34 was the chopper of choice at that time. The *Okinawa*, which carried another battalion and on the float with us, had the Chinooks.

You just remained offshore?

No. I wiggled my way in quite a bit. I would go in when they needed a corpsman to replace a grunt corpsman. I'd go in when they needed medical supplies. Once I went into Danang to find stretchers and we found 40 of them and got them back out. We ended up talking the Army out of them.

What job did you have on the *Iwo Jima*?

I ran the morgue on the ship. We all had assignments and no one wanted to handle the bodies. There was a kid who was training to be a mortician. He and I volunteered to handle the bodies. We figured no one would bother us. When a body would come up, we would clean it up, identify it, fingerprint it, inventory personal effects, and turn it over to graves registration for the Marines to medevac the body to the mortuary in Danang.

Did you have difficulty identifying the dead?

We had their dogtags. Most of them had their ID cards, pictures from home, stuff like that. We'd also take off the bodies pictures of nudes, NVA memorabilia. NVA buckles and insignias were very common as were weapons. They had grenades, pistols, and everything. We got them just like they were in the field when they were put in the body bags.

There was one occasion when we brought in about six bodies. We treated them with dignity but we would slide them across the deck towards the freezer because of the weight. After you handled so many you would just slide them back to the freezer. We slid one back and he hit another body, and it made a noise. He was shot up pretty bad but was alive. We got him up to the OR and they were able to save him. That was the most unbelievable thing saving a guy that we had declared dead.

What was the nature of his injuries?

He had had a shrapnel wound to the bowel and also the lower leg. He had bled out and gone into shock. They were treating so many casualties that they thought he had died. So the corpsman tagged and bagged him. When we slid him across the deck and he hit another body, I guess that was enough jolt to wake him up.

On another occasion, a guy had a through-and-through small caliber wound of the upper leg that hit nothing. The guy went into shock and died. That was the most mysterious thing in the world.

We had another guy who had been killed. He was still wearing his flak jacket, which was zipped up and this normally wasn't done. We felt something under the flak jacket. I stuck my hand down there and felt metal. We immediately brought in EOD. There was a grenade inside his flak jacket. The pin had been pulled. If we had opened that flak jacket, the grenade would have gone off. He was booby trapped. In the morgue there was a porthole beside the freezer. EOD grabbed the grenade, opened the porthole, and threw it out. It exploded near the side of the ship but didn't hurt anything. That's the only way they could get rid of it.

We would get dead Vietnamese civilians and NVA aboard the ship.

The bodies would come out to the ship?

They brought all the bodies to the ship that were on the float. The corpsmen in the field would load them on the '34s and bring them out. We probably had 10 or 12 bodies at any given

time in the freezer. Depending upon what the operation was in the field, those afloat Marines fought some pretty good operations. I remember going in once up the Cua Viet River in small aluminum boats what today we call john boats. They had 15 horse motors and they would go up and down the Cua Viet River moving those Marines. I remember an LCU got hit with a mortar and they medevaced the crew.

We had a surgeon on that ship who was superb. His name was CDR Stills. He was on the Iwo Jima, and then when we were on the Princeton, he transferred with us. He was career Navy. If they were alive when they got there, 9 out of 10 lived. We had an orthopod and a general surgeon. We also had a chest-cutter who stayed with us for about 2 months from the Repose.

I never knew this. So, what was going on was that you had a hospital ship and you had this . . .

This place that we would triage and we'd medevac to the hospital ship if they couldn't handle them. We did exploratories; we did amputations. We did almost anything.

So this was kind of an auxiliary to the hospital ship.

It was an auxiliary but it supported the Marines on float. An LPH could go right off the coast. They wouldn't bring the hospital ship in sight of the shoreline.

Were you up in I Corps?

Up in I Corps the whole time. I thought Danang was a big city where you went to play. I didn't know about Saigon. I didn't learn that until later. Dong Ha was in the rear for me.

I'm trying to visualize this setup. You've got a float. Is this a bunch of ships or just yours?

There are some LSTs out there, an LPD, and an LPH. It was the same concept as the LHDs today.

So you could receive casualties directly from the field and take care of them.

Our Marines were dedicated to that operation and our medical department supported those afloat Marines independently.

So you were just kind of cruising around out there waiting.

We were less than 2 miles offshore. We could see the sampans, the figures on the shore. We weren't far off at all. Our operations would originate from that ship and end on that ship. Our helicopters would fly gun support, they'd fly medevacs. If there was a head injury or something severe, they would take them directly to the *Repose*.

We did the triage in the hangar bay. They would then do the initial treatment and move them up as we had room for surgery. There would be six or eight down there. There would be two or three up in the area designated medical, and two in the OR's at all times. They would come out of the OR and down the hall to ICU. ICU probably had about 15 beds. The two wards were in the back. Later on, I was the first MSC officer on an LHA. I was on the Peleliu for 2 years.

When was that?

That was ‘80 to ‘82.

So you got a commission afterward.
Yes. I was a Medical Service Corps later on.

How long were you aboard the ship?
About 4 months. Then we went back to Subic and went aboard the *Princeton*, which was a converted carrier. It had been converted to an LPH. The whole system changed there. The ship’s company decided they wanted to run the morgue so I got shifted to be an ICU corpsman. I worked in ICU for 3 months.

What kind of a sick bay did it have?
It was an old carrier sick bay. It had two operating rooms, the same as the LPH. We had the same surgeons. The wounded would come the center of the ship instead of the outside. The elevators on the *Iwo Jima* were on the outside. The elevators on the *Princeton* were in the middle of the ship.

So now you were on the *Princeton*.
We were back with 2/26, which was another Marine unit back off I Corps again off Hue--in that area. While I was aboard Iwo Jima I flew medevac missions into Hue during Tet. They were short of corpsmen.

Let’s talk about that for a few minutes because that was a very significant event.
That was a very big event.

How did you get involved in that?
We were supporting Tet. The corpsmen who supported the air wing were stretched very thin so they asked for volunteer corpsmen to fly medevacs. A guy named Tim Port, who was an OR tech, also volunteered. He’s a guy you may to interview. He spent all his time at 3rd Med and on a float as an OR tech. He probably saw about 500 major surgeries.

How do I get in touch with him?
It would be pretty easy. He’s in Blyth, CA, right on the Arizona border. His name is Timothy R. Port and he’s an optometrist.

How do you remember how Tet started?
We were told that there was NVA coming down from the north, more than they could handle. The greater part of Hue had been overrun. Phu Bai had been surrounded. 3rd Med was under siege. We were not to take our wounded to 3rd Med. We put our Marines on the south side of the [Perfume] River--our whole battalion--2/26. We were to bring them back to the ship or the *Repose*. When we flew in, we set down at MACV, which was the headquarters there. I remember the Australians were loading their Foster Beer and getting out of town. They had trucks full of beer and whiskey and they were going south.

You were now on the ship when they needed your services.

They flew us into Hue. We were on choppers flying wounded back and forth. We set down at MACV and then loaded several cases of beer aboard and some other stuff and then going back to the ship.

What did you see when you got to Hue?

Hue was just decimated. It was just overrun. There were a lot of NVA. The Catholic church was held by the NVA. We took a lot of fire from the ground. We would fire back, set down at the LZ, pick up our wounded, and move out. It was torn-up city. The NVA were everywhere. You could tell the NVA because they were wearing brownish or dark green pith helmets.

Where was your LZ?

Our LZ was right on the river behind 2/26. We'd set down, pick up wounded there. It was by Hue University.

You must have had a helluva lot wounded to get out of there.

We did. We took four to six at a time. It was so bad we weren't taking the dead on the first few runs. Then we went in and brought the bodies back. And on the Iwo Jima, we probably had 50 to 80 patients on the ward at all times. We were treating everything from malaria to fever of undetermined origin to dysentery to wounded. We would do a complete exploratory on a guy and do his recover and send him back to his unit. He might stay on the ship anywhere from a month to 6 weeks.

How many physicians were on the ship?

There was a surgeon, an orthopod, a ship's doctor. There were probably eight to ten physicians. It was a complete C & C [collecting and clearing] platoon. There was a young lieutenant named Johnson in charge of it. He wasn't prepared for it but he did a really good job. The platoon had about 60 corpsmen.

When was this?

This was March of '68.

How long did all of that go on?

Four or five days. We were there in support and then pulled the battalion out and went back to Subic. We had been hit pretty bad.

And then you transferred to *Princeton*.

Yes. And we went back to I Corps. We supported operations on the Cua Viet River then. It was a different kind of casualty. We had a lot of people shot up in the choppers going in and coming out compared to what we had on the *Iwo Jima*. It was a different aspect of the war.

How was it different?

Instead of fighting a complete ground force and supporting it, they were moving all the time up and down the river. These Marines weren't in the field as long. They would fly in, you'd get a couple shot in the air, they'd stay a couple of days, then come back to the ship. They

weren't long operations. This was later in '68, after Tet. We were trying to stop whatever was happening on that river.

Did you ever go on these operations yourself?

Just one. We got off the chopper right on the shoreline, which was a pristine beach. They area beautiful sand beaches. I got on a boat and rode it about 5 miles, got off where the base camp was. I waited for a chopper and flew back to the ship.

Where did you go after you served on the *Princeton*?

I came home and went to Saufley field in Pensacola, FL. That was October '68. That was a flight training command.

How did you leave Vietnam?

I flew into Danang on a helicopter one evening, was processed the next day, and that night we flew to Okinawa on a C-130. We had not even been stripped of our weapons. When we got there we checked our .45s, our ammo, and our rifles.

How did it feel leaving Vietnam?

It felt great. I wanted to go home. They kept us in Okinawa a week, I guess to cool us down and then we flew to Travis on a stretch 707. There were probably 140 Marines and corpsmen. I remember seeing Mt. Shasta and it was a beautiful sight. From Travis I caught a flight home to Texas. Then I was stationed at Saufley Field. It was a very unique place. We had two flight surgeons and five GPs. A lieutenant was our senior medical officer. They had T-34s, trainers that looked like World War II airplanes. There were a lot of crashes. A lot of pilot and student crashes. In the 2 years I was there were probably four or five crashes. I volunteered a few times to pick up the bodies.

Did you ever go back to Vietnam?

I went back one more time but not for long--just 2 weeks. From Saufley Field, I went to the 1st Marine Brigade in Kaneohe, HI. And that's when I went back to Vietnam with the 1st Marine Brigade on an inspector general visit. All we did was inspect a few battalion aid stations and stuff like that. It was a big boondoggle.

You eventually got a commission.

I went from there to Headquarters, FMFPAC. I was a first class then. I made chief there. In '75 I went to Taipai, Taiwan to the naval hospital. I made senior chief on the 16th of August and was commissioned on the 17th of August as an ensign. From there I went to Long Beach as the supply comptroller for the dental region. And then I went to the *Peleliu*, which was LHA-5. This was probably the highlight of my career. I had some good corpsmen on board. We set up the triage. We built a method of storing the litters. It was quite a ship!

From there I went to NAS New Orleans as the officer in charge of the clinic and stayed 3 years. Then I went to the Biodynamics lab in New Orleans and retired from there in '88.